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ABSTRACT

This essay examines poverty in Latin America and its effect on education. It focuses on sexual bias and emphasizes that poverty is inherent in the social and economic structure of the region. The text examines how states in Latin America view the role of education, and it describes the growing chasm between the poor and the gentrified in various countries. It explores the key features of poverty and examines the relationship between poverty and schooling, poor families and schooling, teachers and poor children, and poverty and women, especially the myriad ways that poverty and stereotypes restrict opportunities open to women. The essay discusses the role of governmental policies in poverty and how gender in public policy is becoming an increasingly accepted configuration. The difficulties in enacting educational policies due to entrenched sex stereotypes and the resultant political action fomented by civil society are both described. The essay concludes that poverty is endemic in Latin America and affects a large segment of the population. Furthermore, gender bias in schooling slows any progress that women can make in realizing their full potential. (Contains 30 references.) (RJM)

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What Poverty Does to Girls' Education: The Intersection of Class, Gender, and Ethnicity in Latin America

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Keynote speech presented at the Oxford International Conference on Education and Development, 9-13 September 1999.

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Introduction

Poverty is a product of multiple conditions. Lack of knowledge is one factor, but many times exogenous forces are more influential. For many people in the Third World, the colonial experience brought dispossession of land through the arrival of settler populations, the compulsion to sell agricultural products at very low exchange prices, or the use of indigenous groups as labor reservoirs. In the case of Latin America, poverty is the lasting product of social relations that have been established on the basis of profound inequalities.

Latin America is the region of the world where the colonial mode of social organization remained in control the longest, about 325 years. The social mix of conquered populations (Indians), African slaves, and a dominant white minority that persisted was not conducive to the establishment of fair relations of social and economic exchange. Large holdings and subsistence agriculture by exploited and powerless peasantry still characterize the region. Over time, export-based agrarian capitalism led to the emergence of a powerful landed elite capable of using the power of the state to advance its goals (Grindle, 1986). With current trends toward economic competitiveness and the need to develop comparative advantages among countries, it is likely that Latin America will keep up its agro-industrial production, which does not bode well for the resolution of social disparities.

Government expenditures on social benefits in the region remain largely regressive and will likely continue to be so in order to maintain investor confidence. Tax reforms and minimum wage policies have not been used to redistribute income to any significant degree. Policies designed to deal with the structural causes of poverty and inequality, particularly through investment in education and health care, are sacrificed to the short-term priorities of maintaining economic equilibrium under the assumption that programs targeted to the neediest will provide the time necessary for the economy to produce more jobs (Oxhorn, 1998).

This essay deals with poverty and its effect on education in the context of Latin America. Its examination gives special attention to the question of gender, an important social dimension that greatly compounds the impact of poverty. In Latin America, poverty is not a question of pockets of backward people but is rather inherent in the social and economic structure of the region. This structure is predicated on asymmetrical power relations between urban and rural areas, between indigenous peoples and mestizo subcultures, between men and women, and, of course, between the North and the South.

The State and Education

Most states make an effective and yet paradoxical use of education. At one level, education is portrayed as a social good

open to all. At another level, public education is treated with neglect and the children of the poor receive the lowest quality of education. Unquestionably, the function of education as an easily-made promise to reduce poverty serves to create stability in society in the meantime.

Now, in the day of the minimalist state, the emphasis is on short-term solutions. Opportunities for the poor are complemented by the state in its subsidiary role of providing certain public goods and income transfers targeted directly at the poorest in society. The market is supposed to determine the best set of opportunities for the poor (Oxhorn, 1998).

According to official statistics, poverty [1] increased during the 1980-1990 decade in Latin America, going from 46 percent to 60 percent in 1990 in urban areas and from 80 to 85 percent in the countryside. Extreme poverty increased from 22 to 27 percent in urban areas and from 50 to 52 percent in rural areas. In Brazil, the industrial giant of Latin America, 1990 urban poverty stood at 39 percent, or 9 percent above its 1979 level and 5 percent above its 1987 level (CEPAL, 1994). From 1990 to 1997, according to CEPAL, the proportion of poor households in Latin America went from 41 percent to 36 percent, thus returning to 1980 levels. Not only are these gains small but the number of people who are poor increased from 136 million in the 1980s to 207 million in 1997 (CEPAL, 1998, p. 17).

Although peasants and small agricultural producers continue to be the sectors most seriously affected by poverty, in a number of countries the largest proportion of poor people are rural wage-earners, whether engaged in agriculture or working in other sectors, especially commerce and service (CEPAL, 1994, p. 24). The Latin American region has seen an increase in the share of income going to wage-earners with professional or technical qualifications, but not to less qualified earners. So, while poverty has decreased marginally in Latin America as a whole, this has occurred without a significant improvement in relative income distribution.

With the present form of globalization [2], international debt, and structural adjustment programs, Latin America finds itself in an extraordinary moment of civil fragmentation. The growing social inequality has created a pronounced demobilization of mass actors and has weakened the influence of organized labor, making it thus difficult for civil society to struggle for the expansion of citizenship rights (Oxhorn, 1998). In addition, austerity policies have brought reductions to the weakest parts of governmental budgets: education, health, social security, and public housing.

Social expenditures in Latin America, of which education is a substantial part, decreased on a per capita basis by more than 20 percent in 1977-81 and again in 1982-85 (de Janvry and Sadoulet, 1993). The situation improved in the 1990s, when education as a

percentage of the GNP rose from 2.8 percent in 1990-91 to 3.7 percent in 1996-97 and per capita expenditures in education went from $251 to $380 in the same period for the population 5-17 years of age (CEPAL, 1998, p. 126). While greater support to formal education is required, it is also the case that literacy and adult basic education programs, which are those most likely to be needed by the poor, have received very little attention.

Rama (1983) has observed that in Latin America education has expanded more extensively than any other social good but that its development has been "inconsistent with the opportunities afforded by the social order in respect to income and participation in power" (p. 24). While this statement is correct, it must be noted that compared to other countries--particularly in East Asia--Latin America has fallen behind in the attainment of years of schooling. Thus, while the average Korean in the labor force has twelve years of schooling, the average Brazilian has only four.

Key Features of Poverty

At one level, poverty is essentially a normative concept, specific to each society. At another level, there is what has been called an "irreducible core of absolute deprivation" comprising starvation, malnutrition, and visible hardship (Altimir, 1981). As is repeatedly stated--without much horror by now--in the world today about 3 billion people live on US $2 a day or less and some 800 million people suffer from malnutrition.

What else do we know about the poor as a group? Very little, since beyond a few statistics we do not really have detailed studies of the poor. Nor do we know much about the rich as a group, since they can easily avoid scrutiny. The fact that we know little of the lives of poor people greatly handicaps our understanding of the dynamic nature of poverty and how the lives of the rich and the poor intersect in functional and, often, inescapable ways.

In all countries of the world, we are making progress with key social indicators: life expectancy is going up, infant mortality is down, and illiteracy is also down. Yet, the Third World seems permanently condemned to account for the majority of the poor, evinced by the sad distribution that has 51 percent of South Asian's people below the poverty line, 47 percent in Sub-Saharan countries, and 31 percent in the Middle East and North Africa. The statistics for Latin America are milder, with 19 percent (Kabeer, 1996, citing the World Bank). What does this mean in terms of the value of education? Why is our individual and collective knowledge capable of making us live longer and in some respects wiser and yet, for so many, poor and even destitute? Could it be that forces we are ignoring are in fact those which determine poverty?

We have to give more recognition to the dynamic nature of

poverty. We often spend too much time defining poverty through statistical indicators while paying insufficient attention to the mechanisms and processes that create and sustain it. Poverty refers to what the poor lack, but their lack may be the result of a condition created or at best uncorrected by the upper and middle classes. Omnipresent as poverty it, the concept has not been sufficiently theorized in our understanding of how nations advance socially and politically and whether poverty represents an obstacle or it is, instead, a byproduct of unchecked "advance."

Poverty and Schooling

Liberal ideology presents education as a system that can do much to further social mobility and redistribution of opportunities, while becoming an efficient mechanism of equalization and social justice in accordance with meritocratic equality criteria (Filgueira, 1983, p. 60). Moreover, it presents public education as free and compulsory worldwide. This latter assertion is far from the truth in developing countries and yet goes unchallenged by public opinion. It is seldom free and rarely does an educational system in developing countries enforce school attendance. And such a system would be woefully incapable of serving all school-age children.

Educational statistics for Latin America at first glance show an ideal situation with countries evincing rates of nearly 100 percent in gross primary school enrollment. The examination of secondary school enrollment shows a much lower figure, comparable to that of Africa. When educational statistics are contrasted between urban and rural populations, enrollment rates among the latter populations are consistently much lower. When the statistics are compared by sex, the degree of access to schooling and retention among girls and boys does not appear to be very different. In fact, in several countries, aggregate data indicate that girls enroll and complete primary and secondary schooling in greater numbers than boys (CEPAL, 1997; UNESCO, 1998).

If one looks at crude indicators of educational attainment, in seven of nine Latin American countries the rates of primary school enrollment increased in favor of girls during the 1990s and repetition decreased more among girls than boys. In nine out of ten countries, the promotion of girls that finished fourth grade stayed the same or increased, and in eight of those ten countries the proportion of girls that finished sixth grade stayed the same or increased (CEPAL, 1997). So, a first impression is that girls are doing even better than boys in schooling.

While most countries rely on UNESCO statistics (which are themselves produced by member states), there is growing evidence that these statistics grossly underestimate the number of children out of school. These alternative readings of educational participation derive from household surveys, census data, or from computations carried out by UNICEF, whose concern for street children has led it to focus on the out-of-school children and

children in the labor force. Recognized as a major problem are the low rates of primary school completion. One of four goals for 2000 (and unlikely to be met) is to attain at least 70 percent primary school completion in the region (CEPAL, 1998). There are few educational statistics broken down simultaneously by gender and ethnicity. Those that exist (see Post, 1998) show a clear disadvantage for the indigenous and poor woman.

The low school participation rates are a function of family or work obligations that render the individual unable to take advantage of available school offerings, but they are also due to a lack of school facilities. In rural areas, there are single-classroom schools that usually serve only until third or fourth grade (cases of Peru. Bolivia, Guatemala). In urban areas, public schools sometimes cannot meet the demand. Thus, one finds the phenomenon of parents having to stand in line for long hours to ensure that their children will be enrolled before the school reaches its limit (cases of Brazil, Peru, among others).

At the macro level, there is a strong tie between equity in educational capital distribution and the degree of income distribution inequality (CEPAL, 1997). In other words, population groups tend to have levels of school attainment proportional to their income. Most poor and extremely poor families in the region have parents with less than nine years of schooling (72 and 96 percent, respectively) (CEPAL, 1997, p. 143).

But the direction of causality is usually misread. It is not that parents are poor because they have no education; rather, they have no education because they are poor. Moreover, it appears that education in Latin America increasingly needs more years of schooling to be marketable in the labor force. According to studies by CEPAL (1994), it is "necessary to have 10 years of schooling, and in many cases complete secondary to have an income above the poverty line" (p. 31). The level of education needed for a well-paying job will probably increase because globalization trends call for differentiated schooling: high-tech and low-tech, which are accompanied by high-paying and low-paying wages, respectively.

Poor Families and Schooling

Public education, not being free, represents high expenditures for low-income families. In principle, all families recognize the importance of education. Poor families try to give their children at least several years of education, but in the end withdraw them early. Since the children of the poor attend low-quality schools, they tend to withdraw from school without having reached a solid literacy threshold; thus, many of them regress in their reading and numeracy skills.

For poor people, education means a trade-off, usually between obtaining food and going to school. From the perspective of indigenous groups in rural areas, it might mean "having to sell

chickens to buy notebooks" (CEIMME, 1995). Having children go to school also means losing an income-earner. For instance, in tobacco crops of Nicaragua, adults earn US $11 dollars every two weeks; children are often paid half the salary of an adult, but poor parents still need that income (Havelin, 1999).

Further evidence from Nicaragua illustrates the effect of deteriorating economic conditions for poor people in the late 1990s. Many poor Nicaraguan families found themselves with no disposable money for such public school expenses as pencils, notebooks, uniforms, shoes, exams, and even fees for security guards (Havelin, 1999). With an annual per capita income in Nicaragua of about US $340 in 1992, a family with two children in primary school and two in high school would need to pay some $60 per year--over one-sixth of its total income (Havelin, 1999, p. 27, citing Copling).

Low educational attainment not always occurs because children are immediately taken out of school. Often, it happens because the children fall behind in their studies, as in cases when members of the family get sick and children have to help in their care, or when the children themselves get sick and parents have to take them out of school to pay for medicine. Students from poor backgrounds, especially in countries where father abandonment is coupled with poverty, also develop emotional and social needs. Teachers of the poor often report having students who come to school tired, withdrawn, or overly aggressive. In many urban centers, it is common for teachers to find children who show up unannounced on the school's doorstep, their educational history a mystery, or cases where they leave with little or no notice, never to be seen again [3].

Teachers and Poor Children

It is sometimes forgotten that teachers of poor children are often poor themselves. In Bolivia and Ecuador, 65-70 percent of the teachers live in either poor or vulnerable homes (CEPAL, 1998) [4]. In Mexico and Paraguay 35 to 40 percent of teachers live in vulnerable homes (CEPAL, 1998).

For many years, one of the strongest conflicts regarding public education has concerned the salary of teachers who, compared to people in occupations with similar years of schooling, end up earning much less (CEPAL, 1998) [5]. Fortunately, in the past seven years, Latin American teachers have received significant raises, as about 70-80 percent of the increase in educational budgets have gone to better salaries for primary and secondary school teachers (CEPAL, 1998).

The public/private divide in education has significant consequences upon teacher salaries and consequently on the quality of education that is provided to poor as well as non-poor students. On the average, private teachers earn more than public school teachers in primary schools by 10-20 percent; this gap increases to

about 30-45 percent in secondary schools (data for Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, Ecuador, and Paraguay; CEPAL, 1998). The wage differential between public and private is substantial enough to foster a migration of the best qualified teachers toward the private system, thus augmenting the difficulties experienced by poor children. According to the World Bank (1993), one-third of the region's teachers lack professional certificates or degrees. It is well known that these teachers are usually assigned to work in rural areas.

In comparing the salaries of teachers in Latin America with those of OECD countries in terms of the national "level of effort," (defined as the teacher's salary as a percentage of GNP per capita), it has been found that Latin American teachers receive a share comparable to teachers in Northern countries (i.e., about one percent of the GNP). This point is of interest because it suggests that in Latin America it is the countries' level of poverty which creates difficult conditions for their teachers (1995 data, CEPAL, 1998).

In short, poverty not only prevents poor children from gaining access to schooling, but it imposes limits to the number of years of school attainment. Moreover, the ineffectiveness of their limited schooling is compounded by the low quality of their teachers.

Poverty and Women

Feminist theories assert and have empirically demonstrated that gender is an element of social relationships that operates at multiple levels, affecting everyday interactions, public institutions, and work, and including the expression of emotion and sexuality. The consequences of gender distinctions are reflected in political, economic, and cultural spheres. Within the cultural level, gender asymmetries are expressed and reproduced through definitions of femininity and masculinity supported by such mechanisms as ideology, sexuality, language, law, schooling, and the mass media, among many others.

Feminist theories maintain that gender is a social marker that affects men and women. They also maintain that it affects all women negatively regardless of social class and ethnicity. Rather than argue which social marker is the strongest discriminant, feminist theories are sensitive to the interaction effect of these markers and do not underestimate the specificity of gender.

Some societies defend gender differences on the basis of their own cultural values and preferences. But as Kabeer (1996, p. 16) notes, "culture has profound material consequences, not only in shaping priorities and perceptions...but also in shaping allocative behavior and practice."

Culture creates norms that restrict women's physical and

mental space. Across social classes, girls tend to have less physical mobility than boys and thus less freedom to move to larger towns or other countries to continue their education. Norms of femininity and masculinity restrict their choice of fields of study and later their choice of occupations. Women receive less remuneration for their years of education than men. Finally, women tend to aspire to political positions of less prestige and responsibility than men.

In many rural areas of Latin America there are one-classroom schools, which usually offer only the first three or four grades of primary school. This means that to continue their education, children must go to a nearby town--or one not so nearby. Since, for reasons of gender ideology, physical mobility affects girls more than boys, one-classroom schools truncate the schooling trajectory of girls. And because rural education is of poorer quality than urban schooling, the education of poor and indigenous girls is the most negatively affected; a few years later this poor education will be reflected in higher illiteracy rates among women than men, particularly among rural and indigenous populations.

Women are attending higher education in increasing numbers but their "choice" of field remains sexually stereotyped, with few going into scientific and technological fields and most selecting the social sciences and the humanities, in addition to primary school teaching. And whereas some upper and middle-class women may go into nonconventional fields, they are not expected to work in them as hard as men because their families are their priority.

Among poor families, especially those in the rural areas, the sexual division of labor is of fundamental importance. Because girls in poor homes and in rural areas conduct the bulk of the domestic chores, parents perceive school knowledge as moving their daughters away from traditional roles. In communities lacking basic domestic technologies (e.g., potable water, sewage, latrines, garbage collection), girls and women assume these services. Since the poor have less possibility of regular medical attention, typically women and girls must assume these services, which usually translate into special diets and rest for the ill members of the family. In indigenous areas of Latin America, it is women who traditionally weave the clothing for their families. This is an activity that demands considerable skill and time. Its direct and indirect consequence on the availability of rural girls for schooling has not been analyzed.

Poverty, in the Latin American context, also reflects itself in migration, from rural areas to major cities within the country or to foreign countries. A major reason women migrate is to improve the quality of life for themselves and their families. In some cases, this is accomplished by taking menial jobs, in which case education levels are of relative unimportance. In fewer cases, women are put in prostitution positions, which, again, is unrelated to levels of schooling.

While human capital assumes that salaries are a good measure of productivity, there is mounting evidence that women get lower salaries than men for similar years of schooling. It has been asserted that women earn less because they are in fields that are less important and thus less well remunerated, but this is itself a reflection of societal values that discriminate against women's work. Another argument explaining these differences has been that women tend to work fewer hours than men, but a study comparing salary levels in terms of value per working hour found that women in urban areas earned between 66 and 80 percent of men's salaries with same levels of education in eight of ten countries analyzed (CEPAL, 1994, citing 1992 data).

Education certainly helps women, but studies conducted by CEPAL several years ago found that, on the average, a woman needed four more years of education than a man to earn a comparable salary. It should be observed that this statistic was presented at that time as an interesting finding rather than as a major social problem. Education is statistically associated with sociocultural background and with income. The first association (sociocultural background and education) indicates that education is not completely meritocratic; the second (education and income) suggests that education nonetheless is an important tool for social mobility. Competition in the labor market is imperfect and, thus, women need to be protected by work legislation if their education is to be instrumental to their advancement.

While imperfect, higher levels of education do generally lead to higher levels of income for women. On the other hand, improvement in the economic well-being of women does not necessarily translate in greater autonomy and decision making in the domestic sphere, especially concerning decisions over their own body. This disjuncture suggests that higher levels of schooling are not a sufficient ingredient to foster autonomy and self-assertiveness in women; thus, it would appear that there is a need to work on the content and experience of schooling to make education more responsive to women's feelings and practice of empowerment.

Highlighting the connection between poverty and women's education, the following points can be made:

1. Poverty is a strong manifestation of inequity in society but it is not the only one. As Kabeer succinctly, puts it, "Not all women are poor, and not all poor people are women, but all women suffer from discrimination" (1996, p. 20). Gender differences operate in extremely important ways and serve to create and sustain poverty in society.

2. It is incorrect merely to see women as one among other disadvantaged groups, next to rural, unemployed, street children, handicapped, etc. This characterization ignores the gender dimension of disadvantage and sees it as a less ingrained and

pervasive social distinction.

3. Under current globalization conditions, some new opportunities are being opened to women, but gender inequity is not going away; it is being reinscribed in new ways. For instance, more women are moving into low tech jobs regardless of social class.

4. In Latin America, men and women do not seem to show drastically different rates of enrollment and educational attainment compared to other regions of the Third World, but when analyses are made considering ethnicity and high levels of poverty, women are certainly at a disadvantage.

5. In the demands for greater access by girls to schools, it is usually forgotten that what is actually learned in school tends to be quite gendered. Gendered knowledge is acquired via the formal and the hidden curriculum--conditions that exist in all schools regardless of the quality of schooling. There is very little research of a qualitative nature documenting the lived experience of girls and boys in Latin American schools. The comments by Longwe, reflecting on her experience as a teacher in African schools, seems equally applicable to Latin America. She states,

> Women with less schooling are likely to develop a clear perception of the asymmetries in the gender division of labor. The nearer they are to the poverty line, the less they can protect themselves by exploiting the labor of women even poorer than themselves. Being unschooled, they cannot rise by becoming honorary males (1998, p. 26).

6. Contrary to the argument that it is quality of schooling that causes poor girls to drop out (see, for instance, O'Gara et al., 1998), these girls are much more likely to leave school because domestic responsibilities at home do not allow them the free time necessary for schooling and because poor families must rely on the labor of their children from early years. Poor parents rarely know enough of what goes on in schools to be able to judge their quality. If quality were a factor, this would affect boys more than girls, since it is the schooling of boys that tends to be seen as an investment. In some cases, the "relevance" of what is learned in school may be contested by traditional families. The school's lack of relevance, however, is not prominent in decisions to take girls out of school.

7. It is important to move from identifying symptoms that affect the participation of girls in schooling and try, instead, to understand and correct the underlying causes of gender. This implies a substantial use of feminist theory to move into the fundamental and interrelated causes of gender-based discrimination in society and an examination of schooling as a site where gender is both reproduced and contested.

Taking Poverty Seriously

Attempts to solve the problem of poverty cannot avoid dealing with structural factors; otherwise, we will continue indefinitely the pretense of taking it seriously. Helder Camera, a beloved Brazilian bishop who worked with the poor of Northeastern Brazil, is reported to have stated, "When I give food to the poor, they call me a saint; when I ask why the poor don't have food, they call me a communist" (Selbin, 1998).

To fight poverty, several Latin American countries have established emergency funds and social investment funds in areas of health, education, and water and sewage systems. These funds, which have been established at different times, from 1971 onwards, have had a "limited role in launching long-term anti-poverty programs" (CEPAL, 1994, p. 114).

The Role of Governmental Policies

Education is generally considered a universal right. It is also a legal obligation since, according to international law, there is a convention that sustains this principle, the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child. To my knowledge, no state in the Third World has been sued for failing to provide schooling to children [6].

In an ideal world, economic policies that protect fair wages and fair terms of trade for products and services would obviate the need for special measures to ensure the minimum social welfare of citizens. In other words, in a fair economic world, social policies would be redundant. But if the world is not ideal, compensatory policies and their concomitant programs for the poor are needed.

The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (CEPAL in Spanish), a leading institution in the region, has long recognized the importance of educational equity. But educational equity is construed, first and foremost, as the equal distribution of schooling across social classes (proxied through income levels); a distant second in the equity concern refers to urban/rural differences [7]. Gender equity was a concern in the 1970s and 1980s. In the 1990s, shortly before the Fourth World Conference on Women, CEPAL produced its second plan on gender and education (after one enacted in 1977). This plan recognized "the insufficient opportunities for large sectors of the female population to enter and stay in the education system; the maintenance of school curricula and teaching practices that limit women's opportunities to participate in society and reinforce the lack of equity between women and men" (ECLAC, 1995, p. 7). The plan proposed a series of strategic actions to be adopted by governments. It is not precisely known to what extent this regional plan has become reality. What is known is that while all Latin American countries have by now governmental units in charge of women in development, these are clearly understaffed and

underfunded.

Several points can be made on the relation between inequity and social class:

First, Latin America indeed faces a serious distribution of schooling according to income. In Costa Rica, income distribution is one of the most equal in Latin America, yet educational inequalities are still quite visible: 84 percent of young people in the highest income per capita quartile in urban areas complete eight years of schooling by age 16, in contrast with only 40 percent of those in the bottom quartile (CEPAL, 1994, p. 89). In Brazil, the country with the highest income disparity in the region, 65 percent of the school-age children in the top income per capita quartile complete of eight years of schooling by age 16 in contrast to only 14 percent in the bottom quartile (CEPAL, 1994, p. 89). CEPAL (1997) predicts that in Brazil by the year 2000 40 percent of lowest income quartile in urban areas will never complete fourth grade, so conditions exist to perpetuate extreme poverty.

Second, to undertake analyses that examine the distribution of education only by income levels and to fail to look at finer studies that consider the compound effects of gender and ethnicity is tantamount to considering social class as the key determinant of social outcomes and to ignore the role of ideology (regarding gender and "racial" differences) in the formation of social distinctions. The disregard of gender and "racial" variables has proved a major weakness in current theories of national development and social change.

Third, the official discourse about education is still cast in apolitical terms, leaving the ideological function of schooling totally unquestioned. This discourse is so strong that it permeates even the demands for schooling of low-income groups, who also tend to be acritical of the gendered messages the school transmits.

Several Latin American governments have enacted policies to address the question of equity. These policies include:

Increasing subsidies and resources to schools for their day-to-day functioning (being attempted in Bolivia, Chile, Mexico, Peru).

Lengthening the school day in schools that perform poorly in achievement tests and increasing the number of hours per week attending basic and intermediate education (carried out in Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Peru).

Transferring (presumably trained and credentialed) teachers to critical areas.

Expanding school meals and scholarships (Chile).

"the middle classes attach themselves to the upper class as a means of defending the small spaces at their disposal and tend to build up educational systems with the same peculiar features of social selectivity and ascriptions that characterized the traditional oligarchies" (p. 35).

In concrete terms, the imitation of upper-class norms has resulted in the existence of private schooling for groups who aspire to social mobility or who seek to keep their high status. In all countries of Latin America, there is a bifurcated educational system, with private elite schools catering to the wealthy classes and "wannabes" and public schools serving the majority of poor children.

The higher-quality academic circuits function in a very closed manner, with entry usually beginning from pre-school in private and very selective institutions and moving into similar universities [9]. This bifurcation of the educational system leads many to conclude that the apparent openness of the public educational system in fact discriminates because there is strong correspondence between middle-class family culture and school culture (Rama, 1983).

Does this mean that states will not engage in educational policies? No. What it means is that many policies will acquire symbolic rather than material character. It also means that policies will have a very narrow focus and will be short-term. Unless the heterogeneity of the colonial past is resolved through a social pact, such policies can be expected to play only a weak role in the reconfiguration of society.

Gender in Public Policy. Today gender equity is an accepted term in public policy. Certainly, there is public recognition of issues such as domestic violence and the spread of AIDS among women. But in the area of formal education, there still prevails the narrow vision of looking at it as the provision of access for women, particularly to basic education. Schooling as a fundamental site for the formation of gender ideologies passes unquestioned and thus governments do not seek to reform its overt and hidden curriculum or to train teachers for non-sexist and anti-sexist practices [10]. In fact, the first step in any kind of public policy development--the procurement of data--is missing. There is a serious need to acquire more data disaggregating gender by social class, ethnicity, and residence (rural/urban).

Structural Changes to Address Poverty and Schooling. To address structural poverty, certain changes are needed in the global market and would be complementary to other government sectors at the national level.

In the case of Latin America, as is true for several African and Asian countries, the terms of trade that render agricultural products increasingly less valuable compared to technology-rich

Developing field-oriented schools in various disciplines (scientific, technical, artistic) (CEPAL, 1994, p. 118).

As can be seen, all of these measures are gender-blind, focusing on poor communities and their schools. One of the few gender-focused compensatory efforts (not a policy) was attempted in Guatemala under USAID auspices in 1993-1996. Conducted as an experimental project, scholarships were found to increase the attendance of girls in rural areas (see Stromquist et al., forthcoming); subsequent educational policy, however, did not consider providing scholarships for rural girls on a massive scale. In a related matter, it should be observed that many of the governmental policies on gender often exist through the support of international development agencies. So in fact, the policies are not nationwide efforts but rather small projects, many times operating as pilot projects [8].

A further indication of the gender-blind nature of educational policy in Latin America today can be obtained from the objectives that the educational reform has pursued at regional levels through the Hemispheric Summits in Miami (1994) and Santiago (1998). The first summit sought to improve access to and completion of basic education, accelerate decentralization, widen the participation of parents, and improve the quality of teachers, improve the quality of higher education, and support strategies to overcome the nutritional deficiency of students. The second sought to continue compensatory policies, professionalize the teaching and administrative force, foster the development of values through parents and other social actors, promote the access to and use of educational technologies, increase the availability of textbooks, and link all schools in the region through the use of technologies. The specificity of girls and boys education was not mentioned in the objectives agreed upon at either summit nor did the summits attempt to enact measures to address gender equity in the schools.

In other parts of the world there are several educational efforts so incremental in nature that they may end up reinforcing the sexual division of labor in society. One such initiative concerns making school schedules more "girl-friendly," meaning that girls may attend schools for only a few hours so that this may not conflict with their domestic duties. Measures such as this, on the one hand, permit the attendance of girls and thus the acquisition of some knowledge; on the other hand, they are crystallizing norms of gender asymmetry by recognizing and sanctioning the tradition that it is girls who must do domestic work.

A Bifurcated Educational System. In Latin America, any enactment and implementation of educational policies to serve the marginalized social groups will be difficult. As Rama argues (1984), in societies whose historical characteristic was the exclusion of the broad masses from education, and where there is radical sociocultural discontinuity between them and the elite,

products place poor countries in a losing battle for the creation of national wealth. As we saw earlier, augmenting teachers' salaries as a proportion of the GNP per capita, when the GNP per capita is low, is hardly a solution. Unequal terms of trade create differential living standards across countries; with globalization, emigration of highly educated personnel out of the Third World is facilitated by constant demand in major industrial countries to keep their industrial competitiveness. Brain drain ensues, as evident in India and China, which are losing their best engineers to the United States. In addition to improving the terms of trade, other structural reforms that have been proposed are: changing the taxation system and making its functioning more effective, engaging in agrarian reform, and fostering the existence of NGOs as active counter-hegemonic elements of civil society.

For compensatory educational policies to succeed, it is essential to affect other areas of the economy, particularly those pertaining employment and health. Making the design of public policy even more difficult is the realization that labor-intensive growth strategies will benefit poor women only if efforts are made to address the sexual division of labor at home and in the marketplace (Kabeer, 1996, p. 20). If no other social mechanisms for equalization obtain, problems of over-education, devaluation of educational credentials, and competition for education "goods" emerge (Filgueira, 1983). And if educational policies do not remain in place until a stable solution is attained, good efforts may be short-lived. One case in point is Nicaragua: illiteracy before the Sandinista revolution (1979) was at 54 percent. With the literacy campaign it was supposedly reduced to 25 percent, yet estimates in 1996 put it back up to about 50 percent (Havelin, 1999).

Political Action from Civil Society. In trying to explain why some of the oppressed groups rebel to secure better conditions for themselves, Moore observes that "there is no guarantee that exploitation, or just plain misery, will somehow secrete its own antidote.... Human beings have to create their own moral standards of condemnation and their own forms of collective action to change such situations (1978, p. 457).

The first ones to take on the politics of poverty seriously will be the poor themselves. This requires that groups within civil society must be organized to put pressure on the state to implement corrective public policies and to engage in self-support initiatives. What Moore calls "moral standards of condemnation" in my view implies a very strong knowledge foundation. You have to know the conditions that affect you as a poor person or poor group and the conditions that better groups face in order to develop some awareness of inequality and thus of injustice.

It has been observed by some political observers and several feminists (activists and scholars) in the region, that the transition toward democracy in several Latin American countries was dominated by political parties and elite actors, a condition that,

as a whole, has retarded the development of nongovernmental organizations and grassroots groups (Oxhorn, 1998). In several cases, notably Chile and Argentina, women have been incorporated into the state bureaucracy but under the state's parameters that women should be professionals and technical experts, not advocates of feminist issues. In several other countries, international support for the more democratic states has been increased by withdrawing support from NGOs, including the women-led NGOs.

Overall, the women's movement in Latin America has had a limited impact on gender equity policies within formal systems of education. The work of women-led NGOs has concentrated on the education of adult women. Their efforts have addressed educating them in such issues as reproductive health, abortion rights, labor conditions and legislation, violence against women, and human rights. The contributions that women-led NGOs have made to the development of new forms of citizenship among women are considerable. Surprisingly, however, their work has not questioned the ideological nature of the formal education system to the same degree that they have attacked the more concrete welfare policies.

The promise of women-led NGOs for addressing formal education is significant if we consider the multi-class composition of the feminist movement and its multiple organized groups. As Rama observes,

> Education contains in embryo a principle of social homogenization and meritocratic selection, provided that it is itself effectively homogeneous, of scientific quality, and capable of developing personalities with independent criteria (1983, p. 38).

A major challenge for the feminist movement is to become more aware of formal education as a major political terrain and become more active in it. An opportunity to do so may come with a recent decision by the General Assembly of the United Nations to incorporate education in sexual and reproductive health issues at all levels of schooling in an effort to reduce population growth (**San Jose Mercury News**, 1999). This could create an opportunity to work on gender-sensitive teacher training and curriculum content.

International Cooperation and Gender-Sensitive Education. Through support to a few countries, particularly Guatemala, Bolivia, and Paraguay, several bilateral and multilateral agencies are acting to improve the conditions of girls' education. It is important to remark that it is **girls'** and not women's education because international support tends to be concerned only with the basic education of very young women. These agencies also tend to be concerned with low-income women rather than to see gender as a problem that cuts across social classes, as manifested in the identification of poor women and girls as a priority in the Education for All Declaration. This declaration and the resulting national plans for action redefined this priority to mean mostly

girls' schooling. Such a priority, as we now know, has not materialized in substantial support even for girls' education.

Worsening the educational situation confronting poor women is the fact that structural adjustment programs have also reduced national educational priorities to cover only basic education and only for ages 7-14 years of age. This has been observed particularly in the case of Brazil, the Latin American country with the largest number of illiterates (Di Pierro, forthcoming). Agencies such as the World Bank, which play leading roles in shaping educational policies in the Third World, have adopted a view that illiteracy is a problem of the past and that as long as we keep making younger generations more able to go to school, illiteracy problems will disappear.

As to the policies pursued by international agencies, it is worthwhile to recognize that very few studies have been made of their actual effects. The expansion of pre-school in Brazil since the 1980s through the intense support of UNICEF offers important lessons. Through the use of census and household survey data, Rosemberg (forthcoming) notes that approximately 86 percent of the pre-school expansion in Brazil took place through the hiring of women teachers who had only primary education, and were thus saddled with weak preparation and low salaries. She also found a large group of students of ages 7 to 9 in pre-school (11 percent by 1993), most of whom were black and poor. Rosemberg interprets this over-age preponderance as a reflection of the length of time they are retained in pre-school. Remarking that the pre-school women teachers receive low salaries and that the black children are being placed in dead-end schooling, Rosemberg concludes that there is "an intricate game of subordination of class, race, and gender" going on through these "low-cost compensatory educational programs." She observes that a program with a low financial cost may come with a high social cost.

Conclusions

Poverty is endemic in Latin America and affects a large segment of its population. While the region is more democratic than in the past, it is also more unequal than it has been (Oxhorn, 1998).

With globalization, there has been a revival of the importance of education, but this education is framed in terms of economic competitiveness, not social justice. In fact, the need for highly trained technical personnel may not create the atmosphere required to increase attention to poor and disadvantaged groups.

There continues a tendency to look at educational systems as self-contained, focusing on access to and completion of basic education, or as a means to achieve economic competitiveness, giving priority to the question of efficiency over equity. After years of considerable neglect, education in Latin America is

emerging as a major policy concern (see, for instance the work of the Inter-American Dialogue, reflected in Puryear, 1997). The concern, however, is with effectiveness and a narrow definition of quality. By no means is quality being defined in terms of developing civic understanding in youth an adults, not to mention understanding of inequities and inequalities in society. Under such circumstances, it must be affirmed that new educational policies emerging in Latin America are gender-blind.

Countries suffering structural poverty, such as those in Latin America, require a more comprehensive prescription. Education, as a form of legitimate knowledge, certainly helps individuals to obtain better jobs and higher salaries. But in bifurcated educational systems such as those characterizing the region, education brings disproportionately higher rewards to the wealthier social classes.

The fundamental educational problem women--particularly poor women--face in Latin America is the gender-biased nature of schooling. Problems of access and attainment are also present and affect mostly minorities of Indian or African descent. These statistics, though likely understated, are readily available. Aggregate educational statistics do not, however, capture the dynamics of discrimination that women face in the educational systems of their respective countries in terms of completion and what is learned in school. In this regard, more studies based on qualitative research methods are urgently needed.

For schooling to make a substantial difference in the lives of poor women, not only does it have to be redesigned but it has to be accompanied by measures in other sectors of social and economic life, some national and some international. If men and women are able to diminish poverty during the 21st century, a quantum leap will have been made in the attainment of social justice.

Notes

[1] There are many ways of defining poverty. According to Kabeer (1996) two common conceptualizations of poverty are (a) as means, in which case income levels are used as key proxies for wellbeing, and (b) as ends, which concentrates on the actual satisfaction of basic needs, including educational attainment. CEPAL defines poverty as incomes below the poverty line, which is defined as the amount of income relative to the "basic food basket" required to cover nutritional needs, taking into account consumption habits, availability of goods and relative prices, plus the resources required for the satisfaction of non-food needs (CEPAL, 1998, p. 51). It defines as **indigentes** or people in extreme poverty "those whose income is so low that it does not cover even nutritional expenditures" (CEPAL, 1998, p. 51).

[2] Some argue that globalization actually began with colonialism, which was a source of uniform and dominant ideas as to what constitutes modernity and progress.

[3] It is interesting to observe that the same manifestations of poverty have been observed in U.S. cities. Nearly half of the children of California live in poverty, with poverty defined as $30,895 or less for a family of four. These families qualify for the state's free and reduced-cost meal program. In 1998, 47 percent of Californian children qualified for the program. Many parents of these children are immigrants and have two or three low-wage jobs (Bazeley, 1999). In large urban centers, some poor parents have drug problems and engage in domestic violence. There are some schools in California where 20 to 25 percent of the students will switch schools at least once during the nine-month school term (Bazeley, 1999).

[4] CEPAL defines vulnerable households as those whose total incomes are between 0.9 and 1.25 times the value of the poverty line (CEPAL, 1994, p. 12).

[5] Teachers earn less than other professionals with equal years of schooling in all Latin American countries, with the exception of Costa Rica (CEPAL, 1998).

[6] In Brazil, where basic education is protected by the Constitution, there was an unsuccessful attempt by an NGO to sue the government in 1994.

[7] See, for example, the arguments developed by Iglesias, a former executive director of CEPAL (Iglesias, 1981). See also Martin, 1997.

[8] An example of the tendency to confuse externally-funded projects with national policies is reflected in King and Hill, 1993.

[9] There has been a tendency by the elites to send their children to public universities which, in countries such as Brazil, Mexico, and Chile, enjoy high prestige. This situation is changing, however, with the emergence of high-priced, high-prestige new private universities.

[10] Following Streitmatter (1994), we define non-sexist teaching as that attempting to question stereotypes and representations of men and women in different spheres of society, while anti-sexist teaching would be those efforts more proactive in nature seeking to develop an alternative view of society, with both men and women in equally important and valued roles and functions.

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